

INFORMATION REPORT

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SUBJECT Conditions of United States Prisoners of War in the West P'yongyang Camp in 1950

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Physical Facilities

1. In August 1950 there were about 200 United States prisoners of war packed into three rooms of the 18th People's Elementary School in West Pyongyang. No beds or bedding were furnished the prisoners. They were wearing their army fatigue uniforms, most of which were torn and ragged. Few of the prisoners had shoes; the shoes had been taken by North Korean troops. Instead they wore rubber shoes or straw sandals. Almost none of the prisoners had socks. The prisoners were fed three times a day, the meals consisting of one rice ball and a side dish such as kinchi or fish for each prisoner. Occasionally a small bowl of rice porridge replaced or supplemented the rice ball. Because of the inadequate food, most of the prisoners were weak and many were suffering from intestinal disorders and appeared to be dying. In spite of this fact, no medical care was given the prisoners. There was one civilian doctor in attendance, but he had only mercurochrome and iodine for cuts and scratches. No baths were given the prisoners, although on one occasion they were taken to the Taedong River for a swim at the request of the prisoners. None of the prisoners was of higher rank than major.

Propaganda and Indoctrination

2. No work was assigned the prisoners in this camp, and there was no recreation program. An indoctrination program consisting of three hours of class per week using texts presented by the North Korean Labor Party was carried out. Labor Party officials also sent in propaganda booklets on Communism, such as the English editions of "New Times" and other weekly magazines published by the Soviets, but the prisoners did not seem interested. In the publications the main theme was that the United States army should not have entered Korea because it was a Korean civil war. Other propaganda themes repeated to the prisoners were that the South Koreans had started the war by invading North Korea and that the North Korean People's Army was an army of righteousness opposing the American soldiers, who were agents of American imperialists trying to colonize Korea.

Treatment

3. About 23 August 1950 the cultural training section of the North Korean State

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Security Bureau held a round-table discussion for the prisoners. At the meeting the American prisoners presented a list of requests to the North Korean authorities, none of which were accepted. The requests were as follows:

Adequate food, including tomatoes, vegetables, and beans.

Adequate exercise.

Books to read.

At the meeting one pilot said he did not need any propaganda books on Communism. He was immediately singled out by an Internal Affairs Ministry guard and called out of the room. North Korean army officers present believed he was then shot. About one-third of the prisoners at this camp were eventually shot.

4. The guards at the camp were in the charge of officers of the Internal Affairs Ministry. Because of language difficulties and the fanatical hatred which many of the North Korean officers had for the United States, the guards frequently slapped the faces of the prisoners, beat them with Soviet PPSH's, and kicked them. Incidents of this type were repeated daily in the camp, and the prisoners feared the guards to the point that sometimes they trembled when the guards approached.

Interrogation of POW's

5. The interrogation staff at the West Pyongyang camp in August included a North Korean army captain, a lieutenant, and a major who acted as an interpreter. The major, formerly a college English instructor, had been called into service on 5 August 1950 when the North Korean government conscripted almost all educators and teachers, and was assigned to duty as an interpreter with the propaganda unit of the cultural training section of the North Korean State Security Bureau. Questions asked the prisoners included the following:
 - a. Why did you join in the war?
 - b. How did you come to do it?
 - c. Did you not know that the current war began to unify Korea under a democratic form of government?
 - d. At what port did you land?
 - e. How are United Nations forces equipped? What is the I/O of a platoon and company? Describe United Nations' equipment, weapons, and the state of public peace in their areas.
 - f. Who started the war? Do you know?
 - g. What do you think about the North Korean People's army?
 - h. Where were you captured?
 - i. Don't you want to go home?
 - j. Do you know that the American imperialists are trying to make Korea their colony?

1. Comment. Compare with the propaganda at the same camp stating that the South Koreans had begun the war.

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